



1903 - The Oldest Fretted Instrument Magazine In The World - 2019



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BANJO

MANDOLIN

GUITAR

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Paul Mansell

Music in this issue

Ukulele: Andantino 1 (*Carulli*); **Guitar:** Oahu Serenade (*J. A. Palumbo*);
Steel Guitar: Aloha Honolulu (arr. Maurice Hipkiss); **Mandolin:** Toujous Gai (*Zarh Myron Bickford*)

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Hands Across the Sea

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After many years of contributing to BMG, I'm flattered and delighted to have been asked to become its editor. My sincere thanks to Clem Vickery and Alan Middleton for all the work they have put in over the years in reviving BMG and creating such a great magazine.

We're starting the new year with an issue packed full of delights. Our cover features Paul Mansell, a virtuoso ukulele player who plays everything from Baroque to Beatles. Paul and his publishers, Kevin Mayhew, have kindly agreed to us publishing a tune from his latest book in the music supplement.

Mike Chapman continues his great series on plectrum guitar, Ken Perlman his fascinating tutorials on progressive clawhammer banjo and Ron Hinkle his explorations of improvisation on the plectrum banjo. We have a feature on classic banjoist Claude Burvenich, a regular at UK festivals, and Anthony Lis has been trawling the news to find some great musical miscellanea. Ed Parslow introduces us to James Parslow's beautiful instruments and appeals for anyone who knows the whereabouts of other Parslow instruments to come forward. Richard Ineson digs deep into the life of Alfred Cammeyer and Allan Brace has produced a wonderful account of the life and works of master luthier Marco Rocchia, who made some outstanding instruments for Clifford Essex Music Co. We were delighted to see the return of Bill Somerville in the last issue and here he presents a new series featuring Celtic tunes on the tenor banjo. G. de Smaele introduces us to the 'Banjo Gathering'.

I'm really interested to know what you want to see in future issues of BMG. Would you like more articles on playing technique? Do you prefer the historical features? Are there fretted instruments which you would like to see featured? Do drop me a line (david@bmgmag.com) and let me know.

The Banjo Gathering, Bristol, VA, 1st - 4th November 2018

by Gérard De Smaele

[Editor's note: this is an abridged version of a longer account of the gathering.]

It's from the folk revival that our knowledge about the origins and ancient history of the banjo began to evolve. This is a seemingly inexhaustible subject. Since the late 1990s, the 'Banjo Collector's Gathering', by providing a forum for a number of researchers, has played a particularly important role, leading to the creation of two remarkable exhibitions: *The Birth of the Banjo* at the Kathonah Museum of Art in 2003, and *The Banjo in Baltimore and Beyond*, BMI of Baltimore, 2014.

Since the large gatherings of banjoists such as the 'Tennessee Banjo Institute' (1988, 1990, 1992) and those of the 'Maryland Banjo Academy' (1997, 1998, 2000, 2002), the old, even very old banjos - both those of the minstrel show era and the beginning of the classic style fashion trend, relatively neglected until the 1980s - have aroused the curiosity of a wider public and the attention of researchers and collectors. James Bollman's first exhibition at the MIT in Cambridge, Mass. in 1984, as well as the publications of the Japanese Akira Tsumura - including the monumental *One Thousand and One Banjos*, published in 1993 - probably had a similar effect.

Based on an idea by Bob Carlin, the 'Banjo Collector's Gathering' (BCG) was created in 1998 in Cape May, southern New Jersey. Its organisers, James Bollman and Peter Szego, two major collectors of five-string banjos, gathered a handful of discerning amateurs to attend some original presentations and presentations. Against all expectations, the BCG was repeated the following year to become a place of meeting and annual exchanges frequented over time by the most eminent banjo historians and scholars, such as Elias Kaufman, Robert Winans, Cecelia Conway, Mike Holmes, Ulf Jagfors, George Gibson, Scott Odell, George Gruhn Fred Oster, Greg Adams and Pete Ross. Cities were chosen for these gatherings according to their significance or historical link with the instrument: Baltimore for Boucher's workshop, Philadelphia for S.S. Stewart's factory, Ferrum VA and the Blue Ridge Institute, Washington and the Library of Congress etc.

Despite the presence of eminent musicians such as Mike Seeger, Bob Carlin, Reed Martin, Joel Ayers or Clarke Buehling, and despite concert evenings and jam sessions, the BCG, soon to be renamed the 'Banjo Gathering', remains above all a place where historians, researchers and collectors meet.

It examines the instrument, both contemporary and ancient, from its different angles: design, manufacture, restoration, expertise, without forgetting to approach the various stakeholders with the social, musical and artistic life in the USA. The subject is far from simple, because by tackling the history of the banjo we are immediately confronted with the painful realities of slavery, segregation, industrialisation, social misery and politics. If the main purpose of the BG is to encourage trails of work and stimulate academic research, the subjects are approached in a spirit of openness to all, giving hope that the banjo can still have its role to play in the awareness and evolution of a nation as vast and complex as the United States; remaining in this way in the purest continuation of the work of Pete Seeger (1919-2014), spiritual father of the banjo's rebirth during the folk revival.

2018 marked the 20th anniversary of the 'Banjo Gathering', this time in Bristol, Virginia, a city divided into two areas by State Street, marking the border between the states of Virginia and Tennessee. It was in the auditorium of the "Birthplace of Country Music Museum" (an institution created in 2013, a subsidiary of the Smithsonian Institution) that about one hundred participants gathered from 1 to 4 November 2018. It is probably the presentation of *Banjo Roots and Branches* [see *BMG Winter 2018* for review], that was the highlight of this last meeting.

The 'Banjo Gathering' does not publish the proceedings of its conferences. If I had a wish to express, it would be to have access to those of the successive editions, or at least summaries, as well as contact lists of participants.

A big thank you to the organisers, with a special mention for the devoted Greg Adams who played the role of Master of Ceremonies, and helped to ensure that each speaker was comfortable and well received.

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